

**1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.**

Family Services class is a double period yearlong commitment for our students. It involves *learning about* and then *actually working in the community* with autistic children, the elderly, senior citizens, Alzheimer's patients, challenged children (both physically and mentally), and day care children.

The students spend the first six weeks studying curricular topics through lecture, video and guest speakers. Then after this intensive in-class study, students break into groups to rotate into numerous prearranged community sites for 3 days a week for the rest of the school year. They return to class 2 days a week for discussion and reflection on their real world experiences, to turn in journals of their visits, and to continue their classroom studies.

The class maintains close partnerships with the parents, businesses and community sites with which it works. Students work with our county's Department of Aging on all aspects of the elderly. For example, one highlight is when the Department comes in to "age" the students to "feel" the body changes that seniors go through. This preparation is essential when the county provides the students the opportunity to go on a visit to a senior citizens home. By working with children at a local ARC and an Autistic school, students are able to experience what a teacher, social worker, speech pathologist, occupational or physical therapist in this field might be doing. By working at a nursing home the students see what it might be like to be an elder care specialist, nurse, geriatric counselor, activities director, therapist or psychologist. By working in our district elementary schools, the students gain experience in early childhood education.

**The objectives of this class are the following:**

- To promote learning through hands on experiences
- To promote school to community growth
- To promote awareness of community needs
- To promote future related career opportunities

The class is very innovative partly because its inception was nearly twenty years ago, definitely before its time. Family Services has grown over time with the times to meet the needs of the student as well as the community at large. Since students are out on their own, but still under supervision at the site, they are able to become "teachers" themselves. Achievement is evidenced through their site director's comments, teacher observations, written journals, and lessons that the students write and execute. Students are also encouraged to volunteer after school at these sites and within the community.

Family Services can be easily replicated if a school system is willing to commit to scheduling a double period yearlong class, to allocate monies for the project work and bussing to sites and to enlisting the support of a teacher willing to build and maintain the necessary community partnerships. The community at large also needs to be open to having students work at their facilities. The student body must be willing to commit to this type of experience, something the school guidance department should promote as a "people" class, one that provides exploration into teaching, social work, psychology, nursing, day care and other careers. It should be a class that is open to all college prep and vocational students.

**2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified.**

Family Services lets the student grow not only within the school environment, but allows the student the opportunity for growth in the community. Students need to “spread their wings” and put to practice what they have learned; this class does just that. It gives them the ability to take an idea from class and see it work out in the field *the very next day*. The student gets instant feedback at site, whether it be the smile from an Alzheimer’s patient or a site director’s thanks for a job well done.

The Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by this practice are:

**Standard 1: All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills.**

By actually working with special needs children and adults, students are able to get a sampling of different types of careers that may be open to them. For example, teaching, nursing, elder care specialist, social work, therapist, speech pathologist, day care provider, and educational consultant are just some of the careers that could be explored.

**Standard 2: All students will use information, technology, and other tools.**

This class uses videos, 16mm movies, guest speakers, field trips, mass media, the internet/computer to help the students gain knowledge of the subject matter.

**Standard 3: All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem solving skills.**

Once out in the field, students have the freedom to plan and execute ideas with site supervisor approval. They become the “teacher” and their “project” becomes the lesson taught for the day. Students must be quick to react in their given situation, as unforeseen things do occur, as they do in a classroom situation. If they are properly prepared through classroom study, knowledge of their site, and directions given from the site director, a student should be able to find a quick solution to any problems.

**Standard 4: All students will demonstrate self-management skills.**

In preparation for site work, students need to set up a weekly planning schedule. They will plan out projects of their own choice or others dealing with a unit that the site director is doing. The students must use their class time wisely, since project time is limited to one class period on Fridays and Mondays. Any extra planning must be done on their own or with their site partner. Many students in the past have set up group projects on the weekends, then come in on Monday and explain to the whole class what they did together. They really show their enthusiasm this way!

**Standard 5: All students will apply safety principles.**

Prior to going out to our selected sites students are made aware of the rules of safety for each individual site. For example at the nursing home students may not lift anyone out of their chair or help with any personal function, this is a nurse’s job. At ARC students may only physically help with the students after being given background information on each student’s needs. While working with the autistic students Family Services students are trained by the site director as to what is needed physically when working with these special children. Our students learn proper techniques and behaviors to keep everyone, students as well as site people, in a safe situation.

### **3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.**

The first assessment used to see the growth, understanding and knowledge the students have gained is a daily journal. Each student writes a journal for each day at site, any extra field trips, and guest speakers. Journals need to be written so that a person coming into our class for the first time, would be able to sit down, read a journal entry and understand what the student did that particular day. For the teacher it is a way of “seeing” what the student did and how he/she applied his learning that day.

Class roundup sessions every Friday reinforce the new knowledge gained that week by sharing new experiences with the rest of the class. These lively discussions help to problem solve and give new ideas to the students by having all the class members discuss the sites and question each other about these experiences. These sessions also help to alleviate any fears of sites that a student has not been to.

By going out into the community the students become more aware of the needs of more community members. Many of the students have volunteered to go back to these sites on their own time to help out. Students who work within the community have been approached by senior citizens, with whom we have worked, just to say “hello it was nice to have you visit us”. When this has happened, it has not only made the student’s day, but the seniors as well as the whole class. This class shares each other’s triumphs as well as their problems.

In a way Family Services uses the community as their classroom for their hands on experiences. Teaching from a book cannot possibly give these students a true awareness of their community and the people in it. By using books, lectures, videos, and guest speakers as a guide, the students are able to get out there and practice what they’ve learned first hand.

The community and the student body have become aware of this class through newspaper coverage of our activities. As a class we also promote our activities by putting together posters of our work and displaying them in the schools hallway showcases and at Arts Department Festivals. One of our sites also nominated the class for a county Star Award last year for our volunteer efforts, something that made the students very proud.

Many students unsure of their future careers come into this class wondering if it will help them decide what to do. By sampling these different sites it does help those who are interested in working directly with people as a career. A college prep or vocational student can come away from this class wanting to be in the field of nursing, geriatrics, therapy, speech, health aid, teaching, special education, teachers aid, social worker, psychologist, special services, elder care specialist, and so many other fields to branch off into. I have seen this class help students with their choices of careers through their year end journal entry. The journal explains what they have learned in class and what they plan to do with their new knowledge. The students who take this class seem to be people oriented and stay in a field that allows them to be involved.